

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1180

INFO AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 5787

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC EC PFOR PINT

SUBJ: EARLY REACTION TO DETENTION OF FOREIGN CLERGY BY GOE

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1. SUMMARY: AUGUST 14 PRESS CARRIED A WIDE RANGE OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC REACTION TO AUGUST 12 SEIZURE OF 48 CATHOLIC PRELATES AND CLERGY, AS WELL AS FAIRLY DETAILED (THOUGH UNCONVINCING) JUSTIFICATION BY ACTING MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT XAVIER MANRIQUE OF THE GOE ACTION. PUBLIC AND NEWS MEDIA REACTION HAS BEEN CRITICAL OF THE GOE'S ACTION. END SUMMARY END CONFIDENTIAL

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2. IN A PRESS CONFERENCE HELD AUGUST 13, MANRIQUE ENDEAVORED TO DEFEND THE GOE'S ACTION IN BREAKING UP THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT INVOLVED FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN SENSITIVE INTERNAL ECUADOREAN ISSUES, ADDING THAT SEVERAL OF THE PRELATES INVOLVED IN THE MEETING HAD BEEN EXPELLED FROM IR URB TROUBLE IN COUNTRIES FRIENDLY TO ECUADOR. HE CLAIMED THAT DOCUMENTS SEIZED AT THE MEETING CONTAINED MATERIAL CONTRARY TO THE NATIONAL INTEREST AND INVOLVED FOREIGNERS CRITICIZING
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THE GOE. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SPECIFIC NATURE OF

THE DOCUMENTS SEIZED, MANRIQUE DESCRIBED SEVERAL. ONE ALLEGEDLY CONCERNED THE NEED FOR CHRISTIAN LEFTISTS TO UNITE WITH MARXISTS IN SEEKING A SOCIALIST FUTURE. ANOTHER REFERRED TO LEFTIST CHRISTIAN POLITICS IN ECUADOR AND DESCRIBED OPPOSING TENDENCIES WITHIN THE GOE AND ECUADOREAN ARMED FORCES AS "FASCIST AND REPRESSIVE VS. DEMOCRATIC AND PROGRESSIVE SECTORS." OTHERS DISCUSSED THE RECENT CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT IN ARGENTINA FROM A CLASS STRUGGLE VIEWPOINT, CONTAINED TEXTS AGAINST THE GOE, DESCRIBED THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS COMMITTED TO HUMAN LIBERATION IN CHIMBORAZO PROVINCE (WHERE RIOBAMBA IS LOCATED).

3. MANRIQUE REAFFIRMED THE EXISTENCE OF PLURALIST POLITICS IN ECUADOR AND SAID THAT THE DOCUMENTS SEIZED MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT HAVE PROVOKED THE SAME REACTION IF FOUND IN THE POSSESSION OF LOCAL POLITICAL PARTIES. THE KEY POINT, HE REITERATED, WAS THE INVOLVEMENT OF FOREIGNERS IN THESE INTERNAL AFFAIRS. IN RESPONSE TO ANOTHER QUESTION, HOWEVER, MANRIQUE SAID THAT THE DOCUMENTS THEMSELVES WERE FRANKLY SUBVERSIVE, DEALING WITH MEANS OF "ALTERING THE STABILITY AND ORDER WHICH ECUADOR REQUIRES".

4. ECUADOREAN MEDIA REPEATED THE GOE JUSTIFICATION OF DETAINING THE CLERICS AND PRINTED CRITICISM, BOTH LOCALLY AND FROM OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY OF THE GOE'S ACTION. THE MANRIQUE PRESS CONFERENCE WAS COVERED FULLY, AS WAS A STATEMENT BY THE ECUADOREAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OPPOSING GOE INTERVENTION IN THE MEETING. EL COMERCIO OF QUITO GAVE FULLEST COVERAGE, INCLUDING WIRE SERVICE ARTICLES REACTING TO THE SITUATION. AFP REPORTED A CELAM PROTEST FROM BOGOTA, AS WELL AS CLERICAL PROTESTS FROM CARACAS, RIO DE JANEIRO AND MEXICO. EFE REPORTED FROM MEXICO THAT THE UNION OF NATIONALIST MEXICAN CATHOLICS STATED THE GOE HAD "PUT AN END TO A CLERICAL CONSPIRACY AT AN INTERNATIONAL LEVEL." AN EFE ARTICLE FROM WASHINGTON QUOTED A STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN CONFIRMING THE DETENTION OF THE U.S. CITIZENS AND SAID THE U.S. CONSUL IN QUITO HAD BEEN IN CONTACT WITH THEM.

5. EDITORIAL COMMENT WAS LIMITED TO EDITORIAL CARTOONS IN EL COMERCIO AND EL UNIVERSO OF GUAYAQUIL, THE COUNTRY'S TWO LARGEST AND MOST INFLUENTIAL DAILIES. EL UNIVERSO SHOWS A TRENCH-COATED AGENT

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GRABBING DOCUMENTS LABELED "CATECHISM" FROM A GROUP OF PRIESTS, WITH THE CAPTIONS "IS THE DEVIL BEHIND THE CROSS?" AND QUOTING THE AGENT, "LET ME HAVE THAT SUBVERSIVE PROPAGANDA*" EL COMERCIO'S ROQUE LABELS HIS CARTOON "SUCH FEAR*" SHOWING TWO ECUADOREANS SAYING "NOW THEY ARE PROHIBITING THE ENTRANCE OF UFO'S/MZ IT SHOWS A WITCHCRAFT CONFERENCE, A MEETING OF PREFECTS, AND THE CELAM MEETING ALL CANCELLED BY THE GOE.

6 EL UNIVERSO REPORTED PROTESTS FROM SEVERAL ORGANIZATIONS. CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY IN GUAYAQUIL EXPRESSED ITS "CONCERN AND PROTEST" FOR WHAT IT CALLED "AN ATTACK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION." THE DEFENSE COMMITTEE OF LATIN AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS SAID THE GOE ACTION HAD "PLACED OUR COUNTRY WITHOUT REASON IN THE LINE OF THE MOST REPRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA." FROM RIOBAMBA THE NEWSPAPER REPORTED A DEMONSTRATION OF MORE THAN 100 PERSONS. THE BISHOP OF LATACUNGA SAID IT WAS "AN ATTACK ON ELEMENTAL LIBERTIES DEFENDED BY EVERY ECUADOREAN WORTHY OF THIS NAME." EL UNIVERSO ALSO REPORTED A PETITION SIGNED BY SEVERAL CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS WAS SENT TO THE MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT. END UNCLASSIFIED

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7. COMMENT: THE GENESIS OF THIS AFFAIR REMAINS VERY MURKY.. IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE MANRIQUE INSISTED THAT THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN INFORMED OF THE PROPOSED ACTION BEFORE IT TOOK PLACE. THE EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED A VARIETY OF IMPRESSIONS, MOST OF WHICH INDICATE THAT AT LEAST ADMIRAL POVEDA AND GEN. LEORO WERE UNAWARE OF THE DETENTIONS UNTIL AFTER THE FACT AND WERE INCENSED WHEN THEY FOUND OUT. SOME RUMORS INDICATE THAT GEN. DURAN A STAUNCH CONSERVATIVE CATHOLIC, MIGHT HAVE BEEN BEHIND THE OPERATION, OR AT LEAST GAVE HIS APPROVAL. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY IS THAT THE OPERATION WAS INSTIGATED BY THE LANDOWNERS OF CHIMBORAZO PROVINCE. CHIMBORAZO IS ONE OF THE MOST CONSERVATIVE AREAS OF ECUADOR AND THE LANDOWNERS THERE VERY SENSITIVE TO CHURCH EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STANDING OF THE LOCAL INDIANS. THEY HAVE CARRIED ON A CAMPAIGN AGAINST BISHOP PROANO FOR YEARS. MANRIQUE WAS ASKED SPECIFICALLY ABOUT THIS POSSIBILITY IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE AND DENIED THAT CHIMBORAZO LANDOWNERS WERE INVOLVED IN ANY WAY. THE GENERAL REACTION OF GOE AND ARMED FORCES OFFICIALS, AS OBTAINED BY AMBASSADOR AND EMBASSY TO DATE IS THAT SOMEONE HAS GOOFED MIGHTILY IN THIS CASE, NOT THE

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LEAST IN UNDERESTIMATING THE REACTION THE SEIZURE OF THESE PRELATES WOULD HAVE BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY, END CONFIDENTIAL
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